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Official Records

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Friday, 30 November 2007, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Kerim ..... (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 17

The situation in the Middle East

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/62/327 and A/62/344)

Draft resolutions (A/62/L.22 and A/62/L.23)

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Egypt to introduce draft resolutions A/62/L.22 and A/62/L.23.

Mr. Abdelaziz (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): The General Assembly is meeting today to consider agenda item 17, entitled "The situation in the Middle East", which aims at enhancing international engagement in the Arab-Israeli conflict, a conflict resulting from Israel's ongoing occupation of Arab territories since 1967 and its catastrophic practices in those lands.

It is a source of optimism that our debate on this item coincides with a new international approach to address the Arab-Israeli conflict more seriously and attentively, namely, the holding of the Annapolis Conference, which represented a first step on the way forward to resume Arab-Israeli peace negotiations, especially on the Palestinian-Israeli track, in order to reach a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine, the core of the Middle East conflict.

This development comes after Arab delegations reiterated, from this podium and in all other international forums, their steadfast commitment to the just and comprehensive peace reflected in the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002, which was reaffirmed in 2007. That requires action by the international community as represented in the General Assembly to generate support for final-status negotiations on the Palestinian track leading to the achievement of a just, comprehensive and lasting settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict on all tracks, on the basis of the principle of land for peace and the relevant resolutions of the United Nations.

In order to express the international community's opposition to Israel's continuing illegal occupation of Arab territories and its firm belief in the need to end the occupation as soon as possible, every year at this time the General Assembly adopts two draft resolutions of great importance under the agenda item "The situation in the Middle East". The first pertains to the question of Jerusalem. Relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions have reaffirmed the need to preserve the special status of that city, as well as the illegitimacy of any measures undertaken by successive Israeli Governments to alter its character prior to the conclusion of final status negotiations and the establishment of an independent, sovereign and viable Palestinian state. The second draft resolution deals with the occupied Syrian Golan and reiterates the will and determination of the international community to end Israel's forcible occupation of Syrian territory and to achieve its full withdrawal to the borders of 4 June 1967.

Undoubtedly, the convening of the Annapolis Conference, in which all Arab parties concerned,

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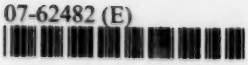

including Syria, participated and the agreement to launch negotiations on the Palestinian track aimed at the establishment of an independent and viable Palestinian state, with East Jerusalem as its capital, before the end of 2008 under a specific time frame that takes into consideration all relevant elements — including United Nations resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Road Map — will foster an international environment conducive to achieving a settlement through Israel's withdrawal from all Arab territories occupied in 1967, including East Jerusalem, Lebanon's Shab'a farms and the Syrian Golan Heights. That would lead to the achievement of just and comprehensive peace to ensure the stability of the Middle East in a context that assures the establishment of an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza within the borders of 1967 and the establishment of normal peaceful relations between Arabs and Israel.

This is the letter and spirit of the Arab Peace Initiative, which is based on the idea of full withdrawal in return for full peace, which we look forward to achieving before the end of 2008. For this to succeed, international support through the General Assembly is necessary, manifested in large part by support for these two draft resolutions. It depends also on Israel showing a commitment to reach a solution, principally through undertaking confidence-building measures. Other such measures include ending all illegal actions that hinder the peace process, showing political will to make progress on all tracks, improving the living conditions of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza and ending all forms of collective punishment.

There is also a need to agree on fair negotiations on the problem of refugees on the basis of General Assembly resolution 194 (III), adopted in 1948. We also look forward to the United States continuing to play a leading role in the process, as well as to a more effective role for the Quartet, which will have the responsibility to follow up the implementation of what is agreed by the Palestinian and Israeli parties in reaching a two-State solution, by establishing an independent Palestinian state before the end of 2008 and achieving full withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories in the West Bank, the Golan Heights and the Shab'a farms. The end of occupation must be full and comprehensive, based on direct negotiations on all tracks and free of delays and prevarications aimed at imposing an illegal situation on the ground.

I have the pleasure today to introduce to the General Assembly two draft resolutions under agenda item 17, entitled "The situation in the Middle East", namely, draft resolution A/62/L.22, entitled "Jerusalem", and draft resolution A/62/L.23, entitled "The Syrian Golan".

The first draft resolution reaffirms that the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions dealing with the special status of East Jerusalem remain the main terms of reference. It also reaffirms the renunciation and repudiation of all legislative and administrative measures and actions undertaken by Israel — the occupying Power — aimed at altering the legal status and character of Jerusalem. Moreover, the draft resolution confirms that any just and comprehensive solution to the question of Jerusalem must take into consideration the legitimate concerns of both the Palestinian and Israeli sides and include provisions on international guarantees to assure its inhabitants' freedom of belief and religion, free from any illegal attempts by Israel to impose a Jewish character on the city.

The second draft resolution, on the occupied Syrian Golan (A/62/L.23), recalls Security Council resolution 497 (1981) and expresses deep concern over Israel's continued non-compliance with it. It also reaffirms the applicability of The Hague Convention of 1907 and the Fourth Geneva Convention, of 1949, to the Syrian territory occupied since 1967 and declares the illegitimacy of both the decision to apply Israeli law on this territory and the settlement activities there. The draft resolution demands once again that Israel withdraw from the Golan Heights to the line of 4 June 1967 and calls for the resumption of peace talks on the Syrian track and respect for commitments reached during the previous talks.

The sponsors of these two draft resolutions believe that the time has come for the international community to look at the Middle East from a comprehensive perspective, particularly in the light of ongoing efforts to move the peace process forward. The peoples of the region have suffered from the scourge of war and aggression, and aspire to achieve peace, stability and development. This cannot be without the international will to provide the political support necessary to achieve a breakthrough that can lead to full Israeli withdrawal from all Palestinian and Arab territories occupied since 1967, on the basis of international law, the principle of land for peace, the

Arab Peace Initiative, the Road Map, the Madrid terms of reference and the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

In order to attain this goal with the support of the international community, the sponsors look forward to the support of all Member States and their votes in favour of these two draft resolutions and in favour of achieving peace and stability in the Middle East.

Mr. Carmon (Israel): The situation in the Middle East is rapidly changing. Although some previously embraced the misleading narrative that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the cause of instability in our region, the facts on the ground show precisely the opposite: that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the consequence of instability caused by the rising extremism which is sweeping through our region.

The recent meeting in Annapolis highlighted the growing recognition and agreement that the real dangers to the region come directly from Islamic extremism and its champion, Iran, which sponsors terrorism around the globe, tries to attain nuclear weapons and relentlessly defies the will of the international community.

Indeed, the real situation in the Middle East was best articulated late last week by a Syrian member of parliament, who said there is an "alliance stretching from Tehran to Gaza". Syria today continues to be the home of forces of extremism and instability, hosting the headquarters of Hamas, Islamic Jihad and others and facilitating Hizbullah's rearming in southern Lebanon.

Behind almost every conflict in the Middle East we see the long arm and shadow of Iran. In Lebanon, Hizbullah — Iran's terrorist organization proxy — foments domestic instability and political deadlock. In the Palestinian areas, Hamas fires rockets and carries out suicide bombings with money and support from Iran. In Iraq, the insurgents and terrorists are financed and trained by Iran.

Iran's destabilizing activities are not restricted to our region. As we saw in the recent warrants issued by INTERPOL in the bombing of the AMIA Jewish Community Centre in Buenos Aires in 1994 and in the bombing of the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires two years earlier, in 1992, Iran has long funded and supported global terrorism. All the while, Iran's campaign of Holocaust denial and calls for Israel's destruction add rhetorical flair to its already murderous and bloody operations around the globe.

The recognized urgency of the Iranian threat has enabled the assembling of a like-minded group of moderate Muslim and Arab States of the region. The gathering in Annapolis reflects the hope for peace and security in the region and the Arab world's fear of the ominous threat from Iran.

In order to secure the situation in our region, the international community must stand up and confront the enemies of peace. Otherwise, progress will never be made — no matter how much we yearn for peace, no matter what we are willing to sacrifice for it.

We have the tools to deal with the extremist threat. For Lebanon, Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) must be fully implemented to ensure the security and stability of the region. Hizbullah continues redeploying in south Lebanon, and its arsenal continues to grow as weapons are transferred across the Lebanese-Syrian border in violation of the arms embargo. For the Palestinian areas, the Road Map clearly states the obligations and responsibilities of each side, in particular with regard to dismantling the terrorist infrastructure and an end to incitement and violence.

The terrorists and extremists have shown their cards. They will not back down. But the international community cannot surrender. The extremists seek to strip us of our most valuable possessions: the freedoms we enjoy and the tolerance and mutual understanding we promote.

The enemies of peace continue to hold in their perilous grasp our missing and captive sons, Gilad Shalit, Udi Goldwasser and Eldad Regev. Israel, and all those committed to peace and freedom, long for the day when our boys, Gilad, Eldad and Udi, will be brought back to their families and to their home.

The situation in our region leads us to two wholly contradictory conclusions. On the one hand, never before in the history of our region has there been such potential for peace and harmony. And on the other hand, never before in the history of our region has there been such potential for instability and tragedy. The choice between these two very different fates can only be made by the people of our region and their leaders.

In Israel, last week, we celebrated the thirtieth anniversary of the historic arrival of former Egyptian President Anwar Sadat in Jerusalem. This courageous, historic first visit by an Arab leader to Israel, and the speech he gave at the Israeli parliament, is to this day credited with changing the geopolitics of the entire Middle East, opening the path for peace between Israel and the Arab world and shaping a new agenda of political relations in the region.

President Sadat's courageous push for dialogue and common understanding was followed years later when King Hussein of Jordan travelled that same road to peace. Today, Israel, Egypt and Jordan have collectively known more years of peace than of confrontation and conflict, years in which open dialogue and cooperative ventures have been possible.

Yesterday, my delegation addressed the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (see A/62/PV.58), showing that, while the tragic choices made by the Arab States could have been averted 60 years ago, the realities of today that were seen in Annapolis suggest that the time is ripe for an agreement to be reached between the parties. There is a commitment by our respective leaders, Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas, to the bilateral Israeli-Palestinian process, supported by the coalition of peace, the moderate Arab and Muslim States and the international community, who will do all that they can to bolster both of us.

History has shown the power and profound implications of the choices made by the leaders in our region. Let us hope that for us, in our time too, the right choices are made for the betterment of our region and for the betterment of our shared future.

Mr. Malmierca Díaz (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): I have the honour to address the General Assembly on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The situation of instability in the Middle East, characterized by the expansion of Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip, the continuation of the construction of the separation wall in the occupied Palestinian territory, the complex situation in Lebanon and the occupation of the Syrian Golan, is a reality affecting not only the region, but also the entire international community.

The Movement reiterates its deep regret that for 40 years, since 1967, the Palestinian people have suffered continuously under the brutal Israeli military occupation of their land, and that they continue to be denied their fundamental human rights, including the right to self-determination and the right of Palestine refugees to return to their land. The toll in human lives and the number of persons injured, displaced, homeless and without access to basic needs in the occupied Palestinian territory are increasing at an alarming rate. The poverty rate is currently 65.8 per cent in the occupied Palestinian territory, reaching more than 79 per cent in the Gaza Strip.

In flagrant defiance and disrespect of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice and in violation of General Assembly resolution ES-10/15 of 20 July 2004, which reaffirms the illegality of the construction of the separation wall on the West Bank and in East Jerusalem, Israel continues to build the wall. The Non-Aligned Movement remains concerned about the huge physical, economic and social devastation brought about by the wall, which divides the occupied Palestinian territory into isolated and fenced cantons, destroying entire communities and splitting East Jerusalem from the rest of the territory.

The Government of Lebanon has continuously endeavoured to stabilize the situation in its territory following Israel's relentless aggression and serious violations against the territorial integrity and sovereignty of that country. The Non-Aligned Movement reiterates its satisfaction with the steps undertaken by the Lebanese Government to implement Security Council resolution 1701 (2006), particularly through the deployment of the Lebanese Armed Forces in the areas south of the Litani River and along the Blue Line. The Movement also welcomes the deployment of the Lebanese Armed Forces along the northern and eastern borders of Lebanon in order to ensure security and stability on the borders.

The Movement remains deeply concerned about ongoing Israeli air and land violations of the Blue Line in breach of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006). We strongly call on Israel to end the occupation of the northern part of al-Ghajar, on the northern side of the Blue Line, to immediately refrain from any violation of Lebanese sovereignty and of Council resolution 1701 (2006) and to refrain from any provocation to the Lebanese Armed Forces or the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon.

The Movement calls for the prompt settlement of the question of the Sheba'a farms, in full respect for

Lebanese territorial integrity, as stipulated in resolution 1701 (2006). We call upon all parties to cooperate in protecting Lebanon's sovereign rights in that area, and we note the important endeavours of the Secretary-General in this regard.

The Movement is acutely aware of the enormous challenge facing Lebanon resulting from the 1.2 million cluster bomblets launched by Israel against Lebanon last summer. The Movement condemns once again the use of such weaponry by Israel and deplores the death toll resulting from them. The Non-Aligned Movement strongly calls upon Israel to provide the exact location of those deadly weapons and the maps of mines planted during its occupation of southern Lebanon.

The Non-Aligned Movement reaffirms once again that all measures and actions taken, or to be taken by Israel, the occupying Power, which purport to modify the legal, physical and demographic conditions and institutional structure of the occupied Syrian Golan, as well as Israeli measures to implement its jurisdiction and administration there, are null and void and have no legal effect.

We also reaffirm that all these measures and actions, including the illegal construction and expansion of the Israeli settlements in the Syrian Golan since 1967, are a clear violation of international law, international agreements, of the United Nations Charter and United Nations decisions including Security Council resolution 497 (1981) and of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949, and that they are a challenge to the international community.

The Movement demands that Israel abide by Security Council resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw completely from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967.

The Non-Aligned Movement sincerely hopes that the international meeting held in Annapolis will contribute effectively to the efforts towards a resumption of direct and substantive negotiations between the parties for the achievement of a comprehensive, just lasting and peaceful settlement, based on the relevant United Nations resolutions and in accordance with the rules and principles of international law.

The Non-Aligned Movement also expresses its hope that the Annapolis process will address all final status issues and will ultimately bring an end to the occupation of all of the Arab territories occupied by Israel since 1967 and that remain under occupation, including the Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and the occupied Syrian Golan, and will lead to the establishment of the independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Mr. Ileka (Democratic Republic of the Congo), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The Non-Aligned Movement reaffirms once again its support for the Middle East peace process, on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 425 (1978), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003) and the principle of land for peace. Likewise, we reject the attempts to modify the mandate of the peace process and the imposition of unilateral measures and strategies aimed at the imposition by Israel, the occupying Power, of an illegal unilateral solution.

The Non-Aligned Movement will continue to support and contribute in every possible way to the achievement of a just, complete and lasting peace in the Middle East, based on all relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid Conference terms of reference, the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Road Map.

Mr. Almansoor (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation aligns itself with the statement just made by the Permanent Representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

This Assembly is meeting again, as we have been doing at this time each year, to discuss the agenda item entitled "The situation in the Middle East", where a state of conflict and tension has prevailed unprecedented in terms of duration and the grave effects that it has left. The situation will be more difficult to rectify as long as the occupation continues.

Those who follow reports on the situation in the Middle East are very worried about the continued deterioration of the situation in the region and the escalating tension caused by negative developments that arise from Israel's continued occupation of Arab land. This occupation has now lasted 40 years, and it continues in the occupied territories, forcing the people of the area to feel bitter, oppressed and threatened. It also creates serious disasters, even though we are in a

new millennium, where most countries have been freed from the foreign occupation and hegemony they suffered for a long time. Other countries have now turned a new page in their histories, have attained national independence and occupy their proper place among all the States of the world.

It seems that the Israeli occupation, which has continued for so long, seeks to consolidate a fait accompli by constructing more settlements in the West Bank and the occupied Syrian Golan, by continuing the construction of the separation wall in the occupied Palestinian territories and by continuing the occupation of some Lebanese land. This creates facts that threaten not only the stability of the region, but the stability of the international community as a whole.

The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian occupied territories reports in document A/62/275 that Israel's duties as an occupying Power do not decrease because of the long occupation. On the contrary, they become greater, because of the illegitimate acts carried out by this Power in the occupied territories.

The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People reported in paragraph 7 of its report (A/62/35) that these continuing Israeli policies posed a grave threat to the prospects of a negotiated, peaceful settlement because of continued illegal settlement activities in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the illegal construction of the wall. That construction is contrary to the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice, which stated that the construction of the wall was contrary to international law, which prohibits the forceful annexation of territories or the carrying out of sovereign activities on the part of the occupying State for the purpose of changing the status of occupied territories.

Israel's decision to enforce its laws, its administration and its jurisdiction in the occupied Syrian Golan is contrary to international instruments and Security Council resolution 497 (1981), adopted on 17 December 1981, which invalidated the decision. That decision was judged to be null and void and without any legal or international merit. Despite that, Israel has started construction on three new tourist settlements on Lake Tiberias, according to information reported by the Economic and Social Council in document A/62/75 and as reported by the State Planning Commission at the Prime Minister's office of the Syrian Arab Republic. The number of settlements that have been actually constructed has reached 45 according to the report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories (A/62/360). That information came from the report submitted by the Syrian Arab Republic, which also mentions that 22 settlements in the area from Mount Hermon in the north to Lake Tiberias in the south are now open to receiving new settlers.

The Washington Post reported on 30 October 2006 that Israel is officially seeking to double the number of settlers in the Golan over the next 10 years. The Secretary-General of the United Nations in his report (A/61/355, para. 14) reports that the Government of Israel has failed to implement its obligations under the Road Map to freeze its settlement activities and dismantle outposts constructed in the West Bank since March 2001. The report also mentioned that the Road Map had cited the end of 2005 as the target date for the settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Even though that deadline has passed, the Road Map remains the main reference and agreed framework for the achievement of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

The time has come to deal with this conflict seriously in order to reach a peaceful settlement, especially since the international peace conference, sponsored by President George W. Bush, which concluded its activities two days ago in Annapolis, focused on the core of the problem of the Middle East. That problem is different from any other struggle or conflict in the world because of the injustice and wrongs suffered by one people for over 40 years. Facts throughout the years of Israeli occupation of Arab territories have proven the failure of military and unilateral solutions, which have only led to more destruction and more violence. This should lead the international community as a whole to move towards supporting efforts to resume negotiations between all parties related to this conflict, encouraging them to achieve a just and comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict and supporting the continued emphasis by Arab States of their commitment to the choice of a just and comprehensive peace, as expressed in the various summit and ministerial meetings and in the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002.

Undoubtedly, the Annapolis conference aimed to push the negotiations forward and to achieve a two-State solution on the basis of a firm and defined time frame according to the terms of reference mentioned in the Arab Peace Initiative and other relevant references. They provide a firm foundation for achieving the desired settlement, since Israel's withdrawal from Palestinian territories will achieve the just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East and the establishment of a viable Palestinian state able to grow and develop.

It is not impossible to achieve all of this. Needless to say, the political framework for a settlement is found in all the relevant resolutions adopted by the United Nations, including the Security Council. That framework constitutes the legal foundation for a political solution.

However, our success will depend fundamentally on whether Israel has the political will to reach a peaceful settlement of the conflict. Israel must cease all practices and military activities that undermine the peace process, including its policies of deliberate murder, starvation, siege and punishment of innocent civilians. Moreover, it must release detainees and prisoners, halt all settlement activity and improve the difficult living conditions of the Palestinian people in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

All of us hope that the international peace Conference held at Annapolis will serve as a new beginning, propelling forward the faltering peace process with a view to the establishment of a comprehensive framework for a settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. We look forward to support from the entire international community, particularly the Quartet, for any peace effort aimed at achieving a just and comprehensive peace for all parties and a complete Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories, including the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, the occupied Syrian Golan and Lebanese territories.

Ultimately, these negotiations must achieve a settlement on all tracks — a settlement free from the tactics of intimidation, threats, the use of force and the imposition of faits accomplis. Such a solution will depend on political will and good faith, which alone will lead to a just and comprehensive peace in the region.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): More than 40 years have passed since the Israeli occupation of Arab territories, and more than 60 years have passed since the Palestinian tragedy. Those long years have witnessed tragedy and the denial of the rights of millions of Palestinians and more than half a million Syrians, whom Israel forced to leave their villages and towns. During the same period, the Arab side has done its utmost to arrive at a comprehensive and just solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict and has accepted the provisions and resolutions of international legality in order to put an end to this explosive situation, which has had a negative impact on peace and security throughout the region and beyond. Years have also passed since the Arab Peace Initiative was adopted by Arab leaders at the 2002 Beirut Summit. The General Assembly and the Security Council have adopted hundreds of resolutions requesting Israel to put an end to its occupation of Arab territories, Palestinian territories and the Syrian Golan.

Unfortunately, it is abundantly clear from all of this that Israel rejects peace, in which it does not believe. Israel is obstinately escalating its aggression in order to carry out its policies of terrorism, murder, destruction, siege and colonization.

Israel's position is designed to undermine the comprehensive peace process and to weaken its terms of reference so that the issue of the Arab-Israeli conflict will be addressed within frameworks unrelated to the Middle East peace process. Successive Israeli Governments would not have been successful in their delaying tactics and their defiance of the will of the international community were it not for the negativism of certain parties, which refuse to impose deterring sanctions against Israel, and the complicity of others in encouraging Israel not to abide by its obligations under the Charter and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Israel, which carries out daily massacres of Palestinians and which waged a destructive war against Lebanon last year, is constantly creating tensions in an already tense region and continues to defy international legality, despite the rejection by the international community, including the Security Council, of the Israeli Knesset's decision to impose Israeli laws on the occupied Syrian Golan. In particular, Security Council resolution 497 (1981) affirmed that the Israeli decision was null and void and without international legal effect. Despite that, Israel continues to build and expand settlements, which number 45 to date.

Israel continues to arrest large numbers of Syrian citizens in the occupied Syrian Golan and condemns them to unjust decades-long sentences, in addition to replacing Syrian educational curricula with Israeli ones, stealing the water of the Golan, imposing prohibitive taxes on the agricultural products of Syrian farmers, uprooting trees, confiscating lands and planting mines, which have wounded 598 Syrian citizens, including 17 children. Israel also buries nuclear waste in Golan lands, which is contrary to international law and the provisions of international legality. We have raised these serious issues in the United Nations and its specialized agencies, including the World Health Organization, the International Labour Organization and the Human Rights Council, and we are waiting for those organizations to submit their reports on this matter to the United Nations.

In a new attempt to scatter the population of the occupied Golan, Israeli occupation authorities have warned the inhabitants of the Syrian village Al-Ghajar that those who live in the northern part of the village — who constitute 90 per cent of its population — will have to relocate to the southern part. That means that the Israeli authorities are confiscating 900 dunams of the village's territory.

Israel's political arrogance and its refusal to respect international legality is perhaps reflected most clearly in the statements made by Israeli leaders, who have confirmed their intention to continue their occupation of the Golan. In the middle of May of this year, a new settlement in Allone HaBashan was announced. Israel began selling housing units at one quarter of the initial value in order to encourage settlers to establish themselves in the Golan. This settlement was built on the ruins of the Arab Syrian village of Al-Juezah. That initiative was set up by the regional Council of Golan, with the intention increasing the number of settlers in the Golan and of changing the demographic status.

The occupying authorities have continued to steal the wealth and natural resources of the Golan, starting with water. Israel continues its excavation with the aim of building a reservoir of 2 million cubic metres of water in the occupied area, which lies near Quneitra and is only 10 metres away from the ceasefire line, opposite the part occupied by Israel and parallel to the Mansoura dam. Those Israeli actions are a violation of international law and Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 497 (1981).

I take this opportunity to call on all Member States to vote in favour of the draft resolution relating to the Syrian Golan as an expression of the international community's rejection of the occupation and as a clear message to Israel that Member States do uphold the rule of law in international relations.

The occupation authorities have dozens of Syrian citizens from the Golan in their incarceration centres and prisons simply because they have refused to accept the occupation and to be identified as Israelis. Some of those Syrian detainees are very seriously threatened by the conditions of their detentions. We have submitted this information to the United Nations Secretariat and to the Security Council, as well as to the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices, so that Israel can be made accountable for its misconduct and so that pressure can be exerted on it to release the Syrian detainees and prisoners whose human rights are being violated.

Because of Israel's violations of political and humanitarian rights, the Human Rights Council adopted resolution 2/3, entitled "Human rights in the occupied Syrian Golan", on 27 November 2006. Since the occupation began, our citizens in the occupied Golan have led an ongoing resistance to the occupation and have refused any attempts at being "judaized" by refusing to accept an Israeli identity. Instead, they hold fast to their Syrian identity. On all possible occasions our citizens in the Golan emphasize that no matter how long the occupation lasts and how hard Israel tries to impose a fait accompli, the occupied lands will be returned to the Syrian motherland. That was reaffirmed by the President of the Syrian Arab Republic, Mr. Bashar Al-Assad, when he said that we are more than prepared to achieve peace but that we are not prepared to give up our lands; we do not allow our sovereignty to be infringed upon; our citizens in the occupied Golan will not be, now or ever, anything other than Syrian Arabs; and no matter the length of the occupation, the land will be ours sooner or later.

The suspicious movements and recent military movements in the occupied Syrian Golan are particularly distressing and in flagrant violation of international law, the United Nations Charter and Security Council resolutions. At midnight on 6 September 2007, the Israeli Air force violated Syrian airspace. That was not Israel's first violation of Syrian

airspace. Israel did not hesitate to commit similar crimes, like bombing Syrian civilian installations in 2003, in flagrant defiance of its obligations under the Israel-Syria Disengagement Agreement of 1974. That is solid proof of Israel's obstinate intent to choose the path of aggression and escalation instead of choosing peace as a future path for good relations with the peoples and countries of the region.

We here reaffirm that the failure of the Security Council on a number of occasions to condemn that aggression has encouraged Israel to step up its aggressive stunts, which have increased tensions in the area and have threatened international peace and security, all which will have serious and uncontrollable consequences.

The use of veto power by a superpower dozens of times has now become a monopoly used to protect Israel. There are also certain sources in this country that have spread rumours and erroneous news to justify the latest Israeli occupation. This is a falsification of facts and is quite irresponsible, protecting the occupation rather than condemning it and punishing the occupiers. It must be recalled that certain countries had to wage war, without the agreement of the United Nations, under similar pretexts.

On 27 November 2007, a conference was held in Annapolis for the purpose of relaunching the peace process between the Arabs and Israel. We took part in that meeting, and we are committed to participating in all international efforts to achieve a just and lasting peace in the region through negotiations on all tracks of the peace process. Most of the parties at the conference insisted on the importance of a just and comprehensive peace in the region and the need to launch peace negotiations on all tracks, especially the pivotal issue of the occupied Syrian Golan. That means that Israel would have to give up its occupation of Arab territories in Palestine, including East Jerusalem, the Syrian Golan Heights and the Lebanese Shaba'a farms.

The General Assembly has been considering the situation in the Middle East for several decades with the understanding that this item deals with the Arab-Israeli conflict and with the need to end Israel's occupation of Arab lands. Throughout the years Israel has constantly justified its continuing persecution of the Palestinian people and has continued to justify its defiance of the resolutions of international legality on weak and changing pretexts. This is designed to shift the blame to certain countries in or outside the region in order to expand the conflict and to stand in the way of any possible solution to the conflict.

The sole reality in the situation in the Middle East is that since 5 June 1967 Israel has been occupying the territory of others by force. It continues to build settlements in the Palestinian territories and in the Syrian Golan. It continues to carry out policies of assassination and premeditated murder and to violate the Geneva Conventions. The sole reality in the situation in the Middle East is that Israel does not wish to live in peace in the region.

In Israel's eyes, just and comprehensive peace does not constitute a definitive solution. That is why it introduced nuclear weapons into the Middle East in the 1950s, at a time when China, India and Pakistan did not yet possess such weapons. Israel refused to accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons or to submit its nuclear installations to International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards. Those are the realities.

Finally, the Syrian Arab Republic has repeatedly affirmed that peace is our strategic choice, that we seek genuine peace and that we are not the party that is standing in the way of such peace. We are among the founding Members of the United Nations, and we bear the responsibility to respect the principles and purposes of the Charter and to combat injustice and aggression. It is the international community's duty to promote justice and the rule of law and to put an end to Israeli occupation and aggression, which are the sole reason for the ongoing violence and tension in the Middle East.

President Bashar Al-Assad recently said that the Israelis must understand that genuine, lasting peace is more beneficial than any transitory situation, and that the price of such peace will be far lower than the cost of occupation and aggression, which cannot continue.

Mr. Lasloom (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): The General Assembly met yesterday and is meeting again today to consider the situation in the Middle East and the question of Palestine, to reaffirm its support for and solidarity with the Palestinian people and to repeat, as we do year after year, that it is high time for the Palestinian people, which has long suffered under the yoke of an odious and harsh occupation, to regain its rights and freedom, to determine its own future and to

establish an independent State on its own territory, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

Today, we note that the Annapolis Conference is generating a new atmosphere of hope and optimism that could put an end to the suffering that has lasted too long and which has been a weight on the world's conscience. The Palestinian people have the same right as any other to aspire to peace, security and freedom. They may yet enjoy their rights after so many years of absurd delays, postponements, procrastination and excuses; we may yet see the end of an occupation that has caused so much tragedy and so much pain. There is no doubt that all of this depends on the good faith and sincere determination of the parties, failing which this ray of hope could fade away once again and become yet another link in the long chain of disappointment, affliction, war and suffering that has bound the peoples of the region.

Two days ago, along with other Arab countries, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia accepted the generous invitation of President George W. Bush of the United States of America to attend the international Annapolis Conference on peace. We did so in order to reaffirm, side by side with other Arab and Muslim States, our total commitment to a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East. Today, everything hinges on the success or failure of this effort, at a time when the peace process has been frozen for so many years, a situation which gave free rein to extremism, frustration and despair — which have reached such proportions that it is hard to calculate their dire consequences.

The time has come for an end to this conflict and for the capacities and the endeavours of the peoples of the region to be focused on peace and development rather than on stoking the fires of war, whose flames will spare no one.

In Annapolis, my country, side by side with other Arab and Muslim countries, reiterated its willingness to relaunch serious and continuous negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians, encompassing all final-status issues and soon to be followed by negotiations on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks, with a view to putting an end to the occupation of the Syrian Golan and the Lebanese Sheba'a farmlands. Everyone will have taken careful note of the fact that the United States and the Quartet have voiced their full commitment to a final settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict within a defined time frame; this will depend on the goodwill of all.

The terms of reference of the negotiations on all tracks must be consistent with the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Road Map, the Arab Peace Initiative, international legitimacy, the Madrid Peace Conference terms of reference and the principle of land for peace. It is also absolutely necessary that an international mechanism be established to closely follow progress in the negotiations among the parties and to monitor the implementation of the outcome of the negotiations.

From paragraph 14 of the report of the Secretary-General (A/62/344), we can see that Israeli excavations in the area of the Al-Aqsa mosque and Al-Haram Al-Sharif and its Mughrabi Gate have led to "civil disorder and tension". The fact that Israel continues to impose faits accomplis has been a continuous obstacle to finding a peaceful solution. Israel has not met its commitments under the Road Map, which calls for a total freeze on the construction of settlements and the dismantling of existing outposts as described in paragraph 15 of the Secretary-General's report (A/62/344). The continuing construction of the separation wall has let to confiscation of more land and has further prevented the free movement of people and goods in violation of the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice issued in July 2004. That, in addition to Israel's refusal to implement the Agreement on Movement and Access of November 2005, which raised the number of closures to 532, in August 2007 alone, which created further obstacles to economic activity (A/62/344, para. 17).

If that is how Israeli practices are described in the report of the Secretary-General and if we compare the picture in the report with the climate of optimism in Annapolis, then it is our duty to warn all of the parties concerned — and Israel, in particular — of the need to adopt proper and essential measures without further delay if final status negotiations are to be taken seriously. As a starting point, we would suggest an end to all settlement activities, the removal of all outposts, release of Palestinian prisoners, and a complete halt to the construction of the separation wall, the embargo, the blockades and the checkpoints that are affecting the Palestinian people.

Israel claims that the Israeli-Arab conflict is not a threat to stability in the region. This is totally

misleading and unhelpful, since the reality on the ground is exactly the opposite, which the entire world can see.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has never idly stood by watching developments in the Middle East, but has instead launched several serious initiatives to put an end to the conflict. Saudi Arabia remains committed to the peace process and to the vision of a two-State solution. I wish to quote His Majesty, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques: Peace springs from the hearts and minds, not from the barrel of a gun or the explosion of a missile. After having bet unsuccessfully on war for so long, it is time for Israel to opt for peace and to realize that peace cannot be established in the area while there is continued occupation of Arab land.

Since we are examining the situation in the Middle East today, we cannot gloss over the situations in Iraq and Lebanon. Both situations require that we mobilize our efforts, cooperate and coordinate to help these brotherly peoples put an end to their long suffering. Saudi Arabia has always emphasized the need to support the territorial integrity of Iraq, its independence and its sovereignty, as well as the need to refrain from any interference in its internal affairs.

We consider brotherly and neighbourly Iraq as an integral part of the Arab and Islamic nation and its people — in all their multiplicity and diversity of beliefs — as a brotherly people without discrimination against creed, ethnicity or religion. We stand equidistantly from all Iraq's components and political trends. Our deep feelings for the suffering of the brotherly Iraqi people is comparable only to our continuous commitment to help Iraqis overcome their tragic situation.

We also renew our commitment to make every effort to help the brotherly people of Lebanon to overcome the tragic situation in their country. Saudi Arabia hopes that our Lebanese brothers and sisters will be able to agree on a consensus candidate as soon as possible to occupy the presidential post that has been vacant for some time. We urge all of the parties and factions in Lebanon to display wisdom and sagacity and to overcome those difficult circumstances.

Mr. Maurer (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): Switzerland welcomes the results of the Annapolis Conference, specifically the commitment of the parties to resume negotiations on a final settlement of the conflict by the end of 2008, as well as the reaffirmation of the obligations set out in the Road Map and the acceptance to create a monitoring mechanism under the aegis of the United States.

We hope that the process the parties have embarked upon will bring the expected results. It is crucial that the parties to the conflict fulfil the commitments they have entered into or which they have reaffirmed and that they keep the channel of dialogue and negotiation open in all circumstances. The aim is to turn into reality the right of Israel to live in peace within secure and internationally recognized borders and the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to the establishment of a viable Palestinian state.

This having been said, the Annapolis process will only be able to win support on both sides and to succeed if it leads to a tangible improvement in the everyday lives of Palestinians and Israelis. In that context, we wish to mention that the political process will win credibility through a parallel process of economic recovery of a similar scope. We therefore welcome the plan of the Quartet's Special Envoy, Mr. Tony Blair, and the donors' conference that will take place in Paris on 17 December 2007.

All discussions must be inclusive. We therefore call for the resumption of the intra-Palestinian dialogue to allow a national consensus to emerge. The political parties must overcome their differences in order to address the hopes of their people for peace. It is only by following this path that the Palestinian Authority will be able to re-establish its authority over the entire occupied Palestinian territory and take the necessary measures to ensure security, good governance and respect for human rights, and establish itself as a reliable partner capable of implementing the commitments it enters in the context of the peace process.

In this context, we are concerned about the economic situation in Gaza. The economic and social situation must receive special attention. The consequences of the total and prolonged closure of the borders on the socio-economic fabric have been terrible. The announcement of a progressive reduction in the supply of energy augurs very badly. While we fully understand the security concerns expressed by Israel and by Egypt and comprehend that the Palestinian Authority cannot accept the faits accomplis

presented by armed groups in Gaza, it is nonetheless our common duty to recall the importance of international law. The Palestinian population of Gaza has the right the right to as normal a life as possible in keeping with the Geneva Conventions and other international human rights instruments. It must not be punished or held hostage by the political situation. So-called security measures must be as contained as possible and must not be carried out for purely political ends. It is urgent to allow economic life to recover by reopening the border crossing points, in conformity with the Agreement on Movement and Access of 15 November 2005.

The territorial unity of the occupied Palestinian territory — Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem — must be maintained and respected. While the situation in Gaza presents a particular challenge, the situation in the West Bank is also far from being satisfactory. Annapolis promises, through its references to the Quartet's Road Map, a number of measures that we hope will be implemented very soon. We would like to recall, in particular, the freeze on the expansion of settlements, the evacuation of the settler outposts and all measures aimed at relaxing restrictions placed on the movement of people and goods and at granting international and humanitarian personnel unrestricted freedom of access without risk to their safety and without hindrance. The Road Map obligations are also applicable in the Gaza Strip.

The security challenge presented by the regular firing of Qassam rockets at Sderot and other Israeli localities neighbouring Gaza must be acknowledged. These attacks against essentially civilian targets are completely unacceptable and represent violations of humanitarian law. They are a reminder of the importance of the fight against terrorism, which is also an integral part of the Road Map.

It is essential that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict be resolved. The conflict is at the centre of the Middle East issue, and its effects extend far beyond the region. At the same time, the other conflicts between Israel and its neighbours — whose origins are a consequence of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict — must not be forgotten. Until those conflicts are resolved, the region will never find the stability that it needs, not only in its own interest but in that of the whole world. We therefore hope that the efforts of the international community will soon also embrace the concerns of Syria and Lebanon.

I would like to conclude with some thoughts on Lebanon. A solution to the crisis seems to be emerging. We encourage the people of Lebanon to overcome their differences so that the election of a President and the restoration of functioning institutions can take place. Internal problems are certainly at the root of the tense and precarious situation in Lebanon, but the situation is also partly a reflection of unresolved conflicts throughout the region. We therefore urge all States that sincerely want to move Lebanon forward to exercise their influence, with the aim of strengthening the unity and stability of the country. This stability will also mean stability for the entire region. The involvement of many States, including Switzerland, in helping the Lebanese people emerge from this deadlock demonstrates the importance of this country and their respect for its integrity.

Mr. İlkin (Turkey): Turkey has aligned itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Portugal on behalf of the European Union. Therefore, my remarks will be brief.

After a long period of recriminations, tension and violence in the Middle East, today we have an opportunity to reverse this adverse cycle. A ray of hope has emerged regarding the question of Palestine, which lies at the very heart of all ills in the Middle East, with wide repercussions both in and beyond the region.

We therefore welcome the Joint Declaration of the Annapolis Conference. We applaud the commitment of both sides to conclude an agreement before the end of 2008 and to implement their respective obligations under the Road Map. It is highly encouraging to see the beginning of serious engagement between Israel and Palestine with a clear objective of a two-State solution, responding to the aspirations of the Palestinians for a homeland and those of Israel for security.

The period ahead will undoubtedly be of crucial importance. Both parties will inevitably encounter difficulties and will have to make difficult sacrifices and decisions. Indeed, a deal may be as hard as ever to reach. Yet there can be no substitute for peace, and the consequences of failure would be devastating for all. In order to achieve the ultimate goal, it is essential that both Israelis and Palestinians should, more than ever, act with utmost restraint and try to build on mutual confidence.

Thus, we call upon Israel to reconsider its policies, which have not delivered the sense of security it rightfully seeks and deserves. It is evident that ending the settlement activities and easing the pressure of the occupation could change a lot on the ground. We also remain concerned at the humanitarian issues affecting Palestinians, particularly in Gaza. The living conditions in the Gaza Strip have become intolerable and have even started to threaten future generations. We agree with the Secretary-General that punitive measures which harm the well-being of an entire population are unacceptable. Such steps serve only to build up further resentment.

On the other hand, we believe that Palestinians should be steadfast in stepping up their efforts to remove radical elements from the scene. We welcome the commitment displayed by President Abbas at the Annapolis Conference to combat chaos, violence and terrorism, and to ensure security, order and the rule of law.

After years of broken promises and bloodshed, it is crucial that Israelis and Palestinians agree this time on concrete steps that will show their people that life is changing for the better. These steps should, first and foremost, focus on economic and trade areas, where the merits of cooperation can be felt in tangible terms. In this vein, we welcome the efforts of Mr. Tony Blair, the Quartet Representative, and hope that the forthcoming donors' conference in Paris will be successful in gathering sufficient support for the empowerment of Palestinians. Such success is essential for the prospect of peace to be viable.

In the meantime, Turkey will continue to contribute to the process of undertaking confidence-building measures and increased interaction between Israelis and Palestinians. The recent joint declaration regarding the establishment of an industrial zone in the West Bank, which was issued in Ankara, is a very encouraging step. When completed, this enterprise will generate a great number of jobs for Palestinians and thus also constitute a security-provider for Israel. It also responds to the objectives of reinvigorating the local private sector and attracting the interest of sources of foreign capital. We sincerely hope that the spirit of cooperation and understanding displayed by the leaders of Israel and Palestine during their visit to Ankara will have a positive impact on future talks. Incidentally, the leaders were able to address the Turkish parliament on the same day, one after another.

We must all fully support the leaders of Israel and Palestine in their courageous endeavours to built a safe and better future for their peoples, thus consolidating peace, cooperation and harmony in the region.

The interwoven nature of the problems in the Middle East necessitates a holistic and comprehensive perspective and approach. Needless to say, without addressing the Syrian and Lebanese tracks, the picture remains incomplete. We are heartened by the Syrian participation in the Annapolis Conference, and we hope to see some progress on this track, too, in the period ahead.

We have been following the developments in Lebanon with deep concern and we would like to see a sense of national unity prevail over factional, religious and ethnical considerations in that country. We will continue our efforts, including our contributions to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, to assist in restoring stability in Lebanon. We hope and expect that the courage, determination and resilience of the people of Lebanon will enable them to overcome all their difficulties.

As for Iraq, we wish to emphasize once again that the integrity and unity of that country hold the key not only to regional but also to global security and stability. Ensuring a dignified place within the international community for a territorially intact, nationally unified and democratic Iraq at peace with itself and its neighbours is always is in the forefront of our concerns.

Today we have an opportunity to show that the Middle East is not condemned to eternal strife. We have an opportunity to show that the region, once the cradle of civilizations and the economic heartland of the world, can indeed solve its problems and unleash a huge potential. That opportunity must be seized. We are duty-bound to future generations. Otherwise, another failed attempt would just sow more anger and despair in a region already drowning in both.

Mr. Ould Hadrami (Mauritania) (*spoke in Arabic*): The situation is very encouraging following the holding of the Annapolis Conference on 27 November. Nevertheless, the road to the culmination of the peace process is long and arduous, and it requires joint international efforts on the part of everyone to ensure peace in the Middle East region, which stands out as a region of international trade and a source of the world's energy. To work towards peace

and security is one of the enduring values of the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, which firmly believes that ensuring justice and respect for international law and the resolutions of the United Nations are the most effective way to reduce tensions and wars and reinvigorate peace and cooperation between peoples and civilizations.

The ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict continues to pose a serious challenge to aspirations to peace, constitutes a flagrant violation of United Nations resolutions and is the focal point for tensions that endanger international peace and security. The framework and general conditions for a just, lasting and comprehensive resolution of the conflict have been for years set out by the General Assembly and the Security Council. They are also stipulated in the Arab Peace Initiative, which guarantees peace and security and includes recognition of Israel by Arab countries in exchange for an end to the occupation of Arab territories and a mutually acceptable solution to all outstanding problems. Israel should seize this historic opportunity to align itself with international law, so that the peoples of the region can coexist peaceably and the Palestinian people can regain their usurped rights by establishing an independent state, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The question of Palestine is obviously the core issue in the Arab-Israeli conflict. We must also consider the other tracks of the peace process, namely, Israel's withdrawal from the Syrian Golan and the occupied Lebanese territories. This is an interdependent peace process, which means that all those matters must be resolved simultaneously if peace is to prevail in the region. The holding of the Annapolis Conference provides a glimmer of hope that we will be able to achieve a just and lasting solution to this bitter and longstanding conflict. The Islamic Republic of Mauritania very much appreciates the strong will of all parties to resume serious negotiations in order to find a lasting solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Such a solution will come about only through the establishment of an independent, sovereign Palestinian State within the borders that existed before the 1967 war, existing side by side with Israel. Israel should take practical steps to encourage peace negotiations and give them a strong impetus, in particular, by releasing all Palestinian prisoners, halting the construction of its wall of separation, ending military sieges and incursions into Palestinian towns and entering immediately into peace negotiations on all tracks. We in Mauritania shall spare no effort to ensure the success of the peace process. We call on the international community to provide the requisite material and moral support in order to achieve success in the peace process, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, including those of the Security Council, the Arab Peace Initiative and the principle of land for peace, so as to preserve peace, justice and international security.

Mr. Al-Allaf (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): Now that the Annapolis Conference has come to an end, the conflict in the Middle East is entering a new and decisive phase in which the international will is united behind the central theme of an independent, contiguous, and viable Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital. The Annapolis Conference has contributed to broad international consensus and support, which the international community clearly witnessed earlier this week.

The proposed time frame for a comprehensive agreement by the end of 2008 places two challenges before the international community, the most important of which is that we must not waste time in achieving the desired result. Work must begin immediately. Failure to act will lead to grave consequences that will feed extremism, heighten conflict and instability in the region and pose a major threat to international peace and security.

The question of Palestine is the primary priority of His Majesty King Abdullah II, as made clear from his continuing contacts with all parties in an effort to establish an independent Palestinian state that can live in peace and security with its neighbours. That is important not only because it is the central issue and the primary prerequisite for a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, but also because it will have a direct impact on regional security and stability. Finding a solution to the conflict will enable the region to rearrange its priorities, properly utilize its resources and focus on the imperatives of social and economic development in a way that ensures prosperity and stability for the nations of the region.

The international Annapolis Conference was a very important and serious beginning towards establishing a Palestinian state within a specific time frame and towards ending many decades of occupation. We must use the momentum created by the Conference

to achieve just and durable peace in the region on all tracks, based on resolutions of international legitimacy. Jordan will work with all the relevant actors to overcome obstacles hindering the achievement of a just solution to final status issues that leads to the establishment of a Palestinian state on Palestine's national soil.

At this stage, the international community must work with the Palestinian and Israeli sides to implement the requirements of this phase. An end to the violence and efforts to reach peace are not the sole responsibilities of one party alone. Israel must promote an atmosphere of confidence by stopping its expansion of settlements; facilitating the movement of Palestinians; removing obstacles, checkpoints and barricades; halting the construction of the separation wall that encroaches upon Palestinian cities, villages and lands; and helping Palestinians to meet their commitment to build their economy and to activate and consolidate their institutions.

It is also time for Israel to start sending positive signals in the context of confidence-building measures by withdrawing from the Palestinian territories that it reoccupied in the West Bank in September 2000. It must also cease all activities in East Jerusalem that jeopardize the peace negotiations and the possibility of reaching a final status settlement.

At the same time, the Palestinians must proceed with reforms and fulfil their commitments by ensuring the state of security and stability that Israel and the region seek. They must assume their own responsibility to organize their security services under the auspices of the Palestinian Authority. They must maintain the rule of law and order in the lands controlled by the Authority. In that respect, we emphasize Jordan's full support for Palestinian legitimacy, represented in the Palestinian National Authority and its President, Mr. Mahmoud Abbas. Jordan looks forward optimistically to the follow-up meeting in Paris to finance the creation of a Palestinian state in the form of system-wide budgets and the financing of concrete projects in the various economic and social sectors.

Political negotiations on final status must be serious and clearly defined, accompanied by immediate measures to mitigate the suffering of Palestinians and improve their living conditions. In that context, Jordan reaffirms its full commitment to support both parties in any way possible to achieve an agreement on all principal issues and to overcome all obstacles they might encounter. We are resolved to work for the establishment of a Palestinian state pursuant to the resolution of international legitimacy, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Road Map. The forthcoming negotiations must include the fulfilment and implementation of those requirements.

Given Jordan's geographic location, its integral connection to the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict, its moderate policies and its unlimited support for the Palestinian people, we believe that the 2008 negotiations will serve as a focus of our attention. That is true not only because Jordan is the host country for the largest number of Palestinian refugees, and the third party that bears the greatest burden of the consequences and effects of the conflict, but also because the final status issues — refugees, security, borders, water, Jerusalem and settlements — are directly linked to Jordan's concerns, national priorities, interests and overall national security.

We hope to find definitive solutions to those issues within the time frame approved at the Annapolis meetings. The Jordanian policy on that matter, which is led and directed by His Majesty King Abdallah II, is based on full coordination with all parties to facilitate the achievement of just and permanent solutions to all the principal issues in a fully cooperative manner that protects the rights of all affected parties.

If the region is to enjoy lasting security and stability, peace must be comprehensive. Peace negotiations must address the Syrian-Israeli track, including a just resolution to the question of the occupied Golan Heights. They must also encompass the Lebanese-Israeli track. We must therefore exploit every opportunity to achieve real progress on all these tracks and intensify international efforts in the coming stage in order to end the Israeli occupation of all Arab territories.

With respect to conditions in Iraq, Jordan is fully committed to supporting the unity of Iraqi territories and the achievement of peace, stability and security there, given the importance of security to all States of the region. There remains an urgent need for true national reconciliation in Iraq based on the principle of the unity of the State and its exclusive right to maintain security on its own territory. Jordan is confident that the Iraqis are the most capable party to shape their own future, and Jordan supports all efforts to enable the

Iraqi Government exclusively to extend its sovereignty and authority throughout the country.

As to Lebanon, the international community must not hesitate to provide all forms of support to that country and its Government. The solidarity and unity of Lebanon are the only option to ensure its stability and to impel its march towards democracy. In that respect, we emphasize Jordan's firm commitment to supporting the stability of Lebanon and all those who want to keep it secure and stable.

Mr. Al-Murad (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): The General Assembly is discussing today one of the most important items on its agenda, the significance of which is due to its close link to international peace and security. For many decades, the Middle East did not enjoy stability, despite its vitality and importance, as a result of the wars that bedevilled it and drained its energies and resources.

Perhaps the most significant issue besetting the region — one that threatens to further worsen its security and stability — is the persistence and continuation of the Israeli Government's policies and aggressive and illegal practices. The Israeli Government has followed a policy based on the use of force to impose its so-called security, while it continues its occupation of territories. Events have proven the futility of that formula, and Israel's persistence in following it will only lead to a further deterioration of security conditions, fuel the sentiments of hatred and perpetuate the cycle of violence and instability in the region.

Israel pursues aggressive practices characterized by assassinations, extrajudicial executions, excessive and random use of military force, the demolition of homes, the destruction of Palestinian institutions, the closure of crossing points, ongoing blockades, collective punishment, collective arrests, arbitrary detentions, and the demeaning treatment of detainees in Israeli prisons. It persists in its construction of the separation wall, despite the fact that the International Court of Justice, in its advisory opinion on 9 July 2004, confirmed the wall's illegality, based on its contravention of decisions of international legitimacy, and demanded its removal and the compensation of Palestinians harmed by its construction.

All those practices represent a clear and flagrant violation of the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Times of War. States parties to the Convention must take tangible measures to activate its provisions as part of their commitment to enforcing Israel's respect for the Convention.

Despite the passage of 40 years since Israel occupied Palestinian and Arab land, the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, remains very grave. The humanitarian, economic, social and security situation continues to deteriorate. The Palestinian people are still without a State and continue to be persecuted and robbed of their property. They suffer from the mounting hardships they face in the course of their continued struggle to activate their inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination. Every year that passes brings more oppression for the Palestinian people and more refugees.

In that context, Kuwait reiterates its support for the struggle of the Palestinian people to obtain all their legitimate political rights and to establish their own State on their own land, with East Jerusalem as its capital. We emphasize that as long as the Palestinian people do not obtain their legitimate rights in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions — in particular resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003) — and on the basis of the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative, there will be no lasting, comprehensive and just solution to the Palestinian question, which is at the heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Kuwait also reiterates its demand for Israel's withdrawal from the occupied Syrian Golan to the lines of 4 June 1967, in implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions. We also emphasize the illegitimacy of Israeli activities in the occupied Golan and stress that the continued occupation and annexation of the Golan pose a real impediment to the achievement of just and comprehensive peace in the region.

With regard to the Lebanese question, we reiterate Kuwait's commitment to stand by Lebanon and to support it in preserving its security, unity, territorial integrity and political independence. We call on Israel to cease its ongoing violations of Lebanese airspace and territory and to withdraw from the Shab'a farms and the village of Al-Ghajar.

We commend regional and international efforts made to achieve national reconciliation between the various Lebanese parties, their return to the negotiating table and a national dialogue to address all issues of contention. We call upon the international community to help and support the Lebanese Government in extending its authority over all its territories.

The Annapolis conference for peace in the Middle East, which concluded its work two days ago with large-scale Arab and international participation, is an important and serious renewed effort to put an end to the occupation and to establish a Palestinian State within a specific timeframe. The State of Kuwait welcomed the holding of the Conference, as it represents a turning point for the region and for international partners in the context of the effective support for a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. We also welcomed the renewed commitment to find a solution on the basis of two States living side by side in peace and security.

The State of Kuwait reaffirms the need to maintain the momentum created by the Annapolis conference. We also emphasize the importance of negotiating on all tracks, including the Syrian and Lebanese tracks, in order to achieve a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the region on the basis of resolutions of international legitimacy, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Road Map. Kuwait also stresses the importance of Israel's discussing three crucial issues in all seriousness, namely, Jerusalem, settlements and the right of return for refugees on the basis of resolution 194 (III), of 1948. The next few months will be a test of Israel's seriousness in achieving peace. The conference could provide an opportunity and some hope for a breakthrough to end the stalemate in the peace negotiations and spare the region further calamities. Perhaps the presence of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon at the upcoming meeting of the Quartet, scheduled to be held on the margins of the donors' conference at Paris in mid-December, will provide added impetus to the peace process.

Given the environment in the Middle East, we are hopeful that negotiations will resume with a view to reaching a peaceful settlement that will lead to the security and stability that everyone in the region looks forward to. The Israeli Government must realize that security is a primary demand of and a right for all the peoples and States in the region, and not exclusively for Israel.

Such a view of the Arab-Israeli conflict is an integral part of Kuwait's comprehensive vision for the Middle East region — one that is based on stability, mutual respect and cooperation between all sides. That stability will undoubtedly require confidence-building measures, foremost among which is making the Middle East a region free of all weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons, which Israel possesses.

Mr. Al-Ansari (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to express my thanks and appreciation to the President for convening this meeting. I would like also to thank the Secretary-General for his reports (A/62/327 and A/62/344) on the situation in the Middle East. I also wish to thank the Secretariat for its preparation of the reports on the subject matter at hand. However, the substantive aspect of portraying conditions in the Middle East must include a greater degree of candour and a genuine analysis of root causes. Frankness and objectivity are the most appropriate means to address this sensitive issue.

We all want to spare the world — including the region of the Middle East — from the scourge of wars and destructive conflicts and the socio-economic devastation they produce. Finding a just solution to the Palestinian question is the best way to end the crisis in the Middle East. We therefore welcome the efforts undertaken recently by the United States to achieve a just peace based on the coexistence of two States, Palestine and Israel, living side by side. My country therefore sent a high-level delegation to the Annapolis conference, for we are keen to support every effort to achieve peace. That is especially the case, given that the goal of the conference was in line with the vision that the State of Qatar put forward when it presided over the Security Council last December. At that time, we suggested the theme of sustainable peace in the Middle East as a platform for the open debate. That meeting led to the issuance of presidential statement S/PRST/2006/51, which, in line with our position, called for the consolidation of peace in the Middle East. We are also one of the sponsors of resolution A/62/L.22 on Jerusalem, and draft resolution A/62/L.23 on the Syrian Golan. We call on all delegations to support them and to vote in favour.

Since peace in the Middle East has complementary and interrelated dimensions that affect one another, the Palestinian people must not fall victim to the historic conflict in the Middle East and the failure to achieve a just and sustainable peace in that sensitive region of the world.

Moreover, the suffering of the Arab people in the occupied Syrian Golan Heights and parts of southern Lebanon must not be forgotten, nor do we accept that the Israeli people are doomed to the same fate. Israel therefore needs to demonstrate its earnestness and political will on the path of peace and to turn words into deeds, especially given the momentum that has been generated by the Annapolis peace conference, by abjuring policies that contravene international law, undermine international conferences and initiatives and peace opportunities, and make the task of the Quartet more difficult.

Israel's persistence in its efforts to build the separation wall in occupied Palestine — contrary to the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice that was requested by the international community by virtue of a General Assembly resolution — and in taking revenge on the Palestinian people through the kidnapping, assassination and detention of leaders and legitimate representatives of the Palestinian people; its excavations under the Al-Aqsa Mosque and its vicinity, which threaten the holy sanctuaries; its targeting of Arab, including Palestinian and Lebanese, cities and villages; its demolition of houses over the heads of their occupants; and its targeting of places of worship, schools and hospitals demonstrate an unfortunate lack of understanding of the culture of peace and of the public good for the peoples of the Middle East, including the Israeli people themselves.

We regret that such violations are taking place in the context of the Security Council's failure to carry out the duty entrusted to it by the Charter and of the feeble political will to implement the resolutions of international legitimacy, embodied by the relevant Security Council resolutions, particularly resolution 242 (1967) — whereby the Security Council formulated in October 1967 the principles of achieving a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East — resolutions 338 (1973), 425 (1978) and 497 (1981); and the successive resolutions of the General Assembly, in particular resolution 194 (III) of 1948 and last year's resolutions 61/25 and 61/26, which are yet to be implemented; and many more appeals made in Security Council statements and reports of the Secretariat. All of those texts recognize the terms of reference of a just and comprehensive peace, and the legal and political obligations of Israel, including that it take practical measures to negotiate with the Arab countries affected by the conflict and to end the Israeli occupation of their territories, to which the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Times of War is applicable under international law, as stressed by the United Nations resolutions.

Israel therefore needs to demonstrate its seriousness about peace through its full withdrawal from the occupied Syrian Golan to the line of 4 June 1967, pursuant to Security Council resolution 242 (1967), which, unfortunately, has yet to be implemented. Israel also needs to effectively withdraw from southern Lebanon. In order to achieve stability in Lebanon, it is essential that all parties respect and implement Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) without discrimination or selectiveness. One of the most flagrant violations of that resolution is the continued Israeli violation of Lebanese airspace and the ongoing occupation by Israeli troops of the Lebanese Shab'a farms and the village of Ghajar, thus undermining the credibility of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and the ability of the Lebanese Government to extend its sovereignty over its territory.

Furthermore, the call for non-interference in Lebanese internal affairs must be a message to everyone, in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions and statements. States calling for non-interference must be role models in refraining from exerting political pressure aimed at pushing Lebanese sovereign issues in certain directions. The Lebanese themselves must decide on the affairs of their country without interference or influence from any quarter.

We in the Middle East feel threatened and insecure as a result of the non-adherence to the universality of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and Israel's failure to place its nuclear facilities under the overall supervision of the International Atomic Energy Agency. Such a state of affairs does not serve good intentions, the establishment of normal relations, or the efforts to eradicate international terrorism in all its forms and manifestations.

The challenges to peace and security in the Middle East are not confined to the classic concept of that crisis alone. The tragic situation that Iraq is currently experiencing, for reasons well known, and which affects its neighbours, requires the full support of the international community for the unity, sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Iraq, while recognizing the primary responsibility of all Iraqi leaders and factions for finding a formula for national reconciliation to achieve justice, stability and security for all Iraqis, millions of whom have fled the country while hundreds of thousands of others have been killed. We therefore stress the need to rectify the historical error committed against Iraq and its destructive negative impact on the Middle East and the global economy, to say nothing of its repercussions on security, since occupation and oppression are among the most prominent root causes of the scourge of terrorism.

Mr. Natalegawa (Indonesia): Indonesia is pleased to participate in this debate, which comes on the heels of the just-concluded international peace conference in Annapolis, Maryland. The conference of Annapolis offers the promise of re-energizing the peace process in the Middle East, which had been stalled for seven years.

We welcome the joint understanding of the leaders of Palestine and Israel at that conference. Their setting of the time frame of the end of 2008 for the peace treaty to realize the two-State solution of Palestine and Israel, living side by side in peace and security, provides a new impetus for peace in the broader region.

It is crucial that this momentum towards peace be nurtured and made irreversible. Indeed, the history of this subject cautions us that a just and comprehensive solution of the Palestinian issue is complex. In 2005, we did not succeed in meeting the target that had originally been agreed for achieving the vision of the two-State solution. We therefore hope that the new process will avoid the shortcomings of the past, and the international community needs to redouble its efforts in order to support the implementation of the peace process.

However, everything must start with the parties to the conflict. In order to ensure that this does not become another wasted opportunity, both sides must demonstrate strong commitment to peace. Both sides must also have strong discipline in the implementation of the joint understanding, including through the work of the steering committee.

For that to happen, all parties concerned should exercise restraint and refrain from any action that could undermine that effort. In that regard, it is important for Israel to halt its aggressive policies and heavy-handed militarism in Palestine. That is necessary in order to avoid counteracting the efforts to build confidence and a positive environment for peace negotiations. Indeed, more consultations on a regular basis are needed in order to address all outstanding core issues: international borders, the status of Jerusalem, Israeli settlements, and refugees. To that end, we welcome the commitment of the leaders of the two parties to meet on a biweekly basis.

Of equal importance is the commitment that there should be no piecemeal approach to resolving the outstanding core issues, and we do not need to reinvent the wheel to establish a foundation for peace. That is because the principles of sustainable and comprehensive peace recognized by numerous Security Council resolutions, including resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), continue to serve as solid ground for a just and fair settlement to the conflict in the Middle East. Those resolutions should form the foundation of our quest for sustainable peace in the region, along with the Arab peace initiative, which was endorsed by the Quartet.

It is imperative that the settlement be comprehensive. It is because the root cause of the conflict is the same: the persistent Israeli occupation of Arab land. Countless relevant resolutions of the United Nations have identified and amplified that point for decades through the principle of land for peace. Consequently, efforts to revive the peace process must include parallel Syria-Israel and Lebanon-Israel tracks. At the same time, we encourage the Palestinians, as they face this promising process, to settle their differences and speak with one voice. There can be no true peace unless there is peace at home.

Likewise, we wish to stress the importance of an all-inclusive political dialogue in Lebanon. Building transparent dialogue among all elements in the country is the key to reconciliation and democratic transformation, as provided for in the Taif Agreement. Thus, Indonesia attaches great significance to the continued consultations among the Lebanese factions

to achieve consensus and break the existing political impasse. Yet, we continue to have a major concern over the daily threat to the life and economy of the Lebanese posed by the unexploded cluster munitions utilized by Israel during the 2006 conflict. A deplorable number of civilians have been injured as a result of those munitions.

It is regrettable that, despite a number of attempts by United Nations senior officials to obtain information regarding the firing data of those munitions, Israel has not yet responded to the request. In that regard, it is important for the international community to join the call by the Secretary-General in urging the Government of Israel to provide detailed data on the exact place, quantity and type of those munitions to the United Nations as soon as possible.

While we speak of the prospects of peace, it is of the utmost importance that we not neglect the present situation. The deteriorating conditions of the Palestinian people living in the occupied territories call for urgent and sustained humanitarian assistance from the international community. If we truly want to convince the people on the ground to embrace peace, that is the place to begin. In that regard, the international community can support the peace process by providing its assistance to alleviate the dire humanitarian situation of Palestinian people in the West Bank, as well as the Gaza Strip.

For that reason, we look forward to the upcoming Paris conference being organized in mid-December. Similarly, Indonesia will be cooperating with South Africa next year as co-sponsors of an Asia-Africa conference for Palestine. The focus will be on capacity-building of Palestine as one way of supporting the ongoing process and Palestinian institutions.

Finally, we are deeply hopeful that the new momentum towards peace will yield fruit. With the joint understanding reached in Annapolis, we look forward to the creation of a viable, independent and sovereign Palestinian State, living side by side in peace and security with Israel, by the end of 2008.

Mr. Hannesson (Iceland): First of all, let me thank the Secretary-General for his report, contained in document A/62/327, on the situation in the Middle East.

Iceland fully supports the ongoing bilateral talks between Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas, and welcomes the revitalization of the Middle East peace process following the international meeting which took place in Annapolis. We strongly urge the parties to use the new momentum to move the peace process forward with the aim of reaching a comprehensive peace settlement within the time frame established. The Quartet and members of the international community must renew their efforts to actively assist and support the parties in their endeavours. While we take due note of those positive developments, we underline that they must be matched by concrete progress and confidence-building on the ground.

Iceland is deeply concerned about the continued violence in the Middle East, which has grave implications for the humanitarian situation and continues to undermine confidence-building efforts, be they in Lebanon, Iraq or Palestine. The vicious cycle of violence on both sides in Palestine must be broken for the sake of the peace process and the security of the two populations, whether they live in Gaza, Nablus or Sederot.

Iceland remains deeply concerned at the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza, where the vast majority is currently dependent on food assistance from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and other international organizations. We call upon the Israeli authorities to ease access in and out of Gaza, both for humanitarian reasons and for commercial flows. The opening of the crossings in and out of Gaza is essential to ensure the viability of the Palestinian economy and improve the living conditions of the inhabitants. With the renewal of the peace process, ways should be sought to bring about reconciliation in order to bring Gaza back into the picture and secure the reunification of Palestinian territory, which is necessary for a sustainable peace. Furthermore, it needs to be ensured that necessary security measures do not entail collective punishment in violation of international humanitarian law.

Settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank are contrary to international humanitarian law, and we call upon Israel to cease all settlement activities, dismantle all the so-called illegal outposts, and comply otherwise with its obligations under international law, including humanitarian law, with respect to the alteration of the character and status of the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. That

applies also to the construction of the wall in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. In that context, we would like to recall the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice on the legal consequences of the construction of the wall.

Progress in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is essential to achieving lasting stability and peace in the Middle East. Final status issues must be on the agenda in the upcoming negotiations. I would encourage political leaders to ensure that the will for peace among a great many people on both sides is reflected in the political process. That requires political courage and true leadership. It requires restraint when restraint is most difficult. It requires a determination to outflank the spoilers on both sides who would wish to sacrifice the real prospects of a peaceful and fulfilling life for millions to a distant mirage of some unattainable utopia.

The readiness of the international community to support the parties, including through the timely presentation of bridging proposals, is essential. In this regard I would like to call attention to Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and the importance of equal participation of women in peace processes for achieving, maintaining and promoting sustainable peace. The international community needs to find ways to involve women in the peace process in a consistent and structured way. There already exists a forum of influential women from both sides, including international figures: the International Women's Commission for a Just and Sustainable Palestinian-Israeli Peace. We would like to use this opportunity to urge the parties as well as the Quartet to consider how the peace process can benefit from influential and effective groups like the International Women's Commission.

Mr. Shinyo (Japan): As we are all aware, after 60 long years of conflict and repeated setbacks stemming from continuing violence on the ground, we seem to have a genuine chance, for the first time since the year 2000, to advance the Middle East peace process. We all know what the outcome must be: the establishment of a Palestinian State living side-by-side with Israel in peace, security and prosperity. The question is how to accomplish it.

Japan believes that peace in the Middle East can be achieved only through negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians, based on such foundations as the principle of land for peace; the relevant United Nations resolutions, including Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002); the previous agreements reached by the parties, including the Road Map; and the Arab Peace Initiative. We are also firmly convinced that peace in the Middle East must be a just, lasting and comprehensive peace which will lead to stability and prosperity in the region as a whole, including in Syria and Lebanon.

The Palestinians and Israelis, since the time of the Oslo Accords in 1993, have been raising and discussing all the relevant issues, such as permanent borders, Jerusalem, security arrangements, refugees and water resources, and have come up with various ideas for achieving peace. But they have not yet been able to translate these plans into reality on the ground.

Against this background, the Joint Understanding concluded by the representatives of the Government of the State of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization was announced at the Annapolis Conference on 27 November. Both sides agreed to immediately launch good-faith bilateral negotiations and to make every effort to conclude a peace agreement before the end of 2008, resolving all outstanding issues, including all core issues, without exception. Japan wholeheartedly welcomes that development and pays the highest tribute to the initiative of President George W. Bush of the United States, as well as to the determined efforts for peace exerted by the two leaders, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert of Israel and President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority, and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice of the United States, which led to this Understanding. We also appreciate the Arab countries' participation in the Conference.

Japan strongly urges both parties to accelerate their efforts to conclude a peace agreement in the near future through the measures contained in the Joint Understanding, including a steering committee, meeting of the leaders of the two parties on a biweekly basis, immediate implementation of both parties' obligations under the Road Map and a tripartite mechanism to follow up implementation.

At the same time, as we work to move forward, Japan is deeply concerned about the continued split between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip since Hamas took control of the Gaza Strip by force. There

will be no Palestinian State without Gaza. It is therefore incumbent upon the international community to find ways to help the Palestinian Authority to reinstate law and order in the Gaza Strip under its legitimate authority and to involve the Palestinians, including those in the Gaza Strip, in the peace process. In this regard, we need to continue to address the socio-economic and humanitarian plight facing the Palestinians, which remains a matter of deep concern.

Japan has always believed that the achievement of the two-State solution requires enhancement of the democratic governance capabilities of the Palestinians through human resources development and the building of Government infrastructures, as well as the development of a viable and sustainable economy. The entire international community must come together to show its strong support for the peace efforts of these two dedicated leaders, in particular through the provision of assistance to the Palestinians in their endeavour to realize an independent State of their own. We believe that the donors conference to be held in Paris in mid-December and the international conference proposed by Russia to follow up the Annapolis Conference meeting will facilitate the international efforts to this end.

Japan has been making efforts for the advancement of the Middle East peace process in line with ongoing international efforts. Our efforts have included political dialogues with each of the parties concerned; assistance to the Palestinians, as a long-standing major donor, focusing on empowerment of the Palestinian people to give them hope for their future; and, last but not least, confidence-building measures among the parties.

One significant effort that Japan has recently undertaken is the initiative to create a corridor for peace and prosperity. The intent is to assist the Palestinians in developing a viable and sustainable economy of their own, which is a prerequisite for a sovereign State, through the creation of an agro-industrial park in the Jordan Valley based on regional cooperation among Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority. The park will provide job opportunities for Palestinians and will export its products to the Gulf and to other countries.

During a visit to the Middle East last August, then-Foreign Minister Taro Aso hosted the second ministerial meeting on this initiative in Jericho, with the participation of Foreign Minister Livni of Israel, Mr. Erekat, head of the Negotiations Affairs Department of the Palestine Liberation Organization, and then-Foreign Minister Khatib of Jordan. The four representatives agreed to build the industrial park to the south of Jericho. We hope that efforts of this kind on the part of Japan will help to create a more constructive atmosphere of mutual trust and understanding among the parties and to positively influence the political dialogue that is taking place between Palestinian and Israeli leaders.

Another recent contribution of Japan was to host the International Media Seminar on Peace in the Middle East, co-organized by the Secretariat's Department of Public Information and United Nations University, in June this year. We strongly hope that such seminars will continue to serve as a useful platform to facilitate confidence-building by promoting dialogue between Palestinians and Israelis.

The President returned to the Chair.

In conclusion, we would like to emphasize that it is primarily the responsibility of the parties themselves to realize peace. No one can replace the parties, and the success of the negotiations depends on their efforts. Japan, for its part, remains fully committed to continuing to play a proactive role by supporting the efforts of the parties to achieve peace and by fostering the advancement of the peace process, in close cooperation with the international community.

Mr. Elamin (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation would like to pay tribute to you, Mr. President, for your enlightened guidance of our work at the present session. We hope that, when that work is completed, we shall have fulfilled the hopes and aspirations of Member States.

My delegation has been following very closely the situation in the Middle East, namely, the Israeli-Arab conflict. That conflict is at the very heart of the Palestinian question and of Israel's occupation of the Syrian Golan and parts of Lebanese territory.

With regard to the Palestinian question, previous speakers have addressed that issue under item 18 in referring to the report of the Secretary-General (A/62/344) and the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/62/35). However, we asked for the floor because we wished to tell the General Assembly that

we attach great importance to the question of the Middle East, which must always remain on the Assembly's agenda.

Israel continues to demonstrate contempt for international legitimacy by disregarding United Nations resolutions adopted since 1947 calling for the establishment of a Palestinian State according to the same formula used to establish the Israeli State in 1948, namely, through a United Nations resolution. Israel continues to display arrogance and intransigence by refusing to cooperate with the investigative committee established by the Secretary-General to investigate the violations committed at Beit Hanoun and the excavations undertaken by Israel around the Al-Asra Mosque in East Jerusalem in order to change the historic character of the Holy City. That is an egregious violation of international norms that has greatly increased tension and caused more violence on the local and regional levels.

Israel is pursuing its expansion by building even more settlements on the lands of the oppressed Palestinian people. At the same time, the international community remains shamefully silent. Israel is continuing to build the separation apartheid wall in flagrant violation of international norms and conventions and with total disregard for the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice and the investigative committee established by the Secretary-General for that purpose.

With regard to Israel's occupation of the Golan Heights, since 1967, we are again witnessing a violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of a United Nations Member State. The occupation is also a violation of the United States Charter, which calls for non-interference in the internal affairs of other States.

Israel also continues to trample on international resolutions in that regard. It still occupies the Sheba'a farms, an integral part of Lebanon. As if that were not enough, in the summer of 2006 it launched a major military operation against Lebanon, which was yet another violation of the rights of peoples and States.

My delegation would like to reiterate the points lying at the heart of the Israeli-Arab conflict. The only way to relieve the tension in the region is to enable the Palestinians to enjoy their legitimate right to self-determination through the establishment of an independent State, with Jerusalem as its capital. Israel must also put an end to its occupation of the Syrian Golan, withdraw from Lebanese territories and respect fully the relevant resolutions of legitimacy. That is the only way to guarantee achieving stability, security and peace in the Middle East.

My delegation also attaches great importance to the situation in the brotherly country of Iraq. We support every effort aimed at stopping the bloodletting and maintaining Iraq's territorial integrity and the dignity, peace and security of its people.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on agenda item 17.

I would like to inform members that action on draft resolutions A/62/L.22 and A/62/L.23, under agenda item 17, as well as draft resolutions A/62/L.18 to A/62/L.21, under agenda item 18, will be taken together at a later date to be announced.

The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 17.

The meeting rose at 5.50 p.m.